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Agency, Resistance and the Non-'Ideal' Victim: How women deal with sexual violence

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Abstract:

Many undergraduate students in the UK fall into age groups particularly at risk from interpersonal violence. Recent evidence suggests a range of interpersonal violence is part of the university experience for a significant number of students. In this article, we report on the findings of an online survey of male and female students administered at a university in the north of England in 2016 exploring experiences of interpersonal violence during their time as a student. Focusing on the qualitative responses, 75 respondents, mostly women, wrote about their experiences of sexual violence. In presenting women's accounts, we challenge the construction of the 'ideal victim' who is viewed as weak, passive and without agency or culpability (Christie, 1986). Women adopt a range of strategies to actively resist men's sexual violence. In doing so, they challenge and problematise perpetrators' behaviours particularly tropes that communicate and forefront the heterosexual dating model of courtship. These findings raise implications for women's strategies of resistance to be viewed as examples of social change where victim-blaming is challenged, perpetrator blaming is promoted and femininity/victims are reconstructed as agentic. Universities must educate students about sexual violence, dating and intimacy, as well as provide support for victims of sexual violence.

Key words:

Sexual violence; resistance; non-'ideal' victims; dating model; education

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Key messages:

- Women resist men's sexual violence committed against them.

- They challenge and problematise the heterosexual dating model of courtship.

- Universities must educate students about sexual violence, dating and intimacy.

Introduction

In the 'Hollywood Scandal' that made headline news in 2017, the question was asked 'why did women not say something at the time' of experiencing Harvey Weinstein's sexually violent behaviours? Many women, whether direct victims or not (and some men), have given reasons to explain their silence including: being wary of potential consequences for their careers and/or their reputations; their fear of not being believed, and of being told they have 'misread' the situation (see for example Campbell, 2017a; Campbell, 2017b). Far from being restricted to high-profile cases, these fears are endemic in women's responses to sexual violence (for example Durbach and Grey, 2018). The ability and choice to speak out is not solely an individual one: social structural and cultural factors play a key part in 'who can be heard' (see Eyre, 2000). Some women, for example, *had* previously spoken out about Harvey Weinstein, in fact, as Campbell (2017b:17) says, 'Weinstein's predatory ways have been public knowledge for years; it's just that nobody took any notice'. Who is heard can also be understood through the lens of power relations, for example, in her analysis of a sexual violence case, in a Canadian university, Eyre (2000:293-294) argues that:

> [...] the voices of women students and feminist discourses on sexual harassment were either marginalised or silenced. [...] the discursive framing of sexual harassment constitutes power relations in the academy and ultimately legitimises sexual harassment [...]. Power operates discursively and works to support dominant interests.

A problem in accepting this power of dominant discourse can be to deny agency to individuals (Jackson, 1992; Calhoun, 1995), implying that individuals have no choice in the reconstruction of their own experiences: instead they 'become the objects of [another] discourse' (Worrall, 1990:22). Before the Weinstein scandal broke, this discourse and re-framing of sexual violence for the benefit of powerful men was oppressing and silencing less powerful women. However, dominant discourses are 'not impervious to

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dismantling' (Said, 1986:154) and individuals are not passive vehicles for dominant discourses (Garland, 2001; Robinson and McNeill, 2004). Individuals use language and discourse to make sense of their own realities. They thus have agency and choice in using discourse (Davies and Harre, 1990, 1999). Actively positioning themselves in less dominant discourses implies that individuals are 'both resisting and becoming complicit in their own moral regulation' (Luke, 1995:9). Yet it is not helpful to conceptualise the possibilities for those victimised as being binaried, i.e., that they are located as either with or without agency. Rather, as this article argues, it might be more useful to recognise the complexity of responses those who are victimised might inhabit in order to better provide social-structural responses that feel more relevant to 'real life' (see also Bay-Cheng, 2015). This article begins by outlining sexual harassment and sexual assault before reviewing the existing research on the nature, extent and impact of such sexual violence. An analysis of why sexual violence happens follows. In the next section, the dominant discourses around the binary of the 'ideal'/non-'ideal' victim of sexual violence are unpacked including a review of the research about how victims resist sexual violence. We then write about our methods before presenting an analysis of the findings from our research with students at a university in the north of England. The article ends with the implications of the findings for policies and practices.

Defining Features of Sexual Violence and its Prevalence

The majority of what is called serious sexual violence, such as rape and sexual assault, happens in private spaces (Pain, 1991; Calkins et al., 2015), perpetrated by (ex-)partners rather than by strangers (Ministry of Justice, 2013). What is understood as low level sexual violence – because it is typically below the threshold of a crime - sexual harassment, is a 'common occurrence' in public spaces (Pain, 1991:421) and involves verbal abuse such as sexual comments. Sexual harassment can also involve physical abuse such as unwanted sexual touching (Kelly, 1988), which is also sexual assault and meets the legal threshold for crime (Sexual Offences Act, 2003). For example, in Kelly's (1988) interviews with 60 women, she found that 56 (93%) and 42 (70%) of them had experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault, respectively. Women were sexually harassed at work and in public places, by both known and unknown men, as well as by friends and ex-partners. Sexual harassment involved visual, verbal and physical acts, such as leering, whistles, propositioning, sexual joking, pinching and grabbing. Almost

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half of the women said that sexual harassment was a normal experience with many of these women saying that it happened on a habitual basis. In terms of the sexual assault experienced by 42 women, this 'always involved physical contact' (ibid:103)[i], such as being touched by strangers, on public transport or in the street, and attempted rape. Sexual assault was also committed by partners, friends and dates. Thus, women experienced sexual violence along a continuum (ibid).

More recently, research in the UK, has focused on sexual violence being experienced by university students. Almost half (45%) of students at universities are under the age of 21 (Universities UK, 2016) and thus they are in the age group (16-24) most at risk of violent victimisation (see the *Crime Surveys for England and Wales*). In a study of 580 female students, Stenning et al. (2013) found that 44% had reported experiencing sexual harassment since becoming a university student, with 47% of these students reporting a fellow student as the perpetrator. Of the 580 female students, 8% reported that they had experienced sexual assault (including serious sexual assault such as attempted rape and rape). A NUS (2011) survey of 2,058 female university students found that almost one in four respondents had experienced unwanted sexual contact. Over two-thirds (68%) of students had experienced verbal (e.g., sexual comments) and physical (e.g., groping) sexual harassment, within and outside their institution. For some students, these experiences were every day. Similarly, Phipps and Young (2015) in their research on 40 female university students found that over two-thirds discussed sexual harassment as a normal aspect of university life. More recently, NUS (2018) research with 1,528 male and female students found women were more likely than men to report experiencing sexual violence and over three-quarters of perpetrators were male. Findings show that 2.3% of respondents reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact by a member of university staff and 30% of respondents reported a member of staff, predominantly an academic, making sexualised jokes and remarks, 8% of whom said that this had happened three or more times. Less than 1% of students reported experiences of sexual assault or rape. Sexual violence, particularly sexual harassment, is thus a pervasive feature in many female university students' lives. As such, the focus of this paper is predominantly on sexual harassment and sexual assault, rather than serious sexual assault, of university students.

Explaining Sexual Violence

Walby (1990:128) argues that male violence against women – and we would add, women's responses to male violence - 'cannot be understood outside an analysis of patriarchal social structures'. Kavanaugh (2013:21) argues that much of the sexual victimisation that occurs in the 'hypersexualised contexts' of urban nightlife is normalised. Yet, Kelly (1988:97) argues that the unwanted sexual intrusions experienced by women, 'transform routine and/or pleasurable activities […] into unpleasant, upsetting, disturbing and often threatening experiences'. McLaughlin et al. (2012) posit that power then is at the heart of such theorising of sexual harassment. Males sexually harass females to dominate them. In Quinn's (2002:392) research, where she interviewed both men and women, she argues 'girl watching', in its more serious form, is a social practice, a directed 'tactic of power', used in everyday settings, where men watch girls to sexually evaluate them. 'Girl watching' involves verbal gestures (e.g., 'check it out'), explicit comments about the woman's body or imagined sexual acts and boasts about sexual prowess (ibid:387). 'Girl watching' is trivialised as play, fun, and normalised as natural and commonplace, especially in the presence of other males: it is 'a game played by men for men' (ibid: 392). But not only for 'fun', it serves to (re)produce shared masculine 'identities, group boundaries and power relations' evoking a performance played to other men through which hegemonic masculinity is (re-)claimed: a masculinity characterised by dominance, strength, and an uncontrollable sexuality (ibid:393). Positioning women as sexual objects in this way also devalues their perspective. Quinn (2002) argues that by playing 'games' that objectify women, men distance themselves from the feminine other to facilitate practices that reinforce hegemonic masculinities. In doing so, they create contexts in which sexual harassment can be encouraged and normalised, violence is visited upon individual women, and patriarchal relations are reflected and reinforced (Walby, 1990; Radford and Stanko, 1996).

In Phipps and Young's (2015:13) research, female students ascribed such performances of masculinity as described in Quinn's (2002) research, to 'lad culture': a 'pack mentality' of group behaviour that is not necessarily 'attractive or accessible to individual men'. In their research, many of the female university students said that humour and 'banter'

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normalised and trivialised worrying sexist attitudes and behaviours because such behaviour was excused as 'being a lad' (Phipps and Young, 2015:7). Being 'one of the lads' is typically associated with drinking alcohol, 'having a laugh' and objectifying women (Francis, 1999:357). Such 'laddish' behaviours are thought to be key features of social life at universities in the UK (Phipps and Young, 2015). For example, in Stenning et al's. (2013:110) research, one of the female participants in the focus group spoke about how new male students are initiated into the men's football or rugby club, by 'distributing FHM magazines and other pornographic material to new recruits in their welcome pack'. As Dempster (2009) argues women are then assessed by a group, in public, for sexual attractiveness *and* for their potential/availability to engage in heterosexual practices, especially in the night-time economy (Phipps and Young, 2015:7). As such, women experience sexual victimisation in this space (Kavanaugh, 2013).

'Fighting Back': The Agentic Victim

Christie (1986:19) writes about the 'ideal victim': deserving of victim status because they are weak, they are doing a 'respectable project', and they cannot be blamed for being where they were. Thus, the 'ideal victim' is weak and passive, without agency and culpability. For example, Christie (1986:19) argues, the 'ideal' rape victim is a 'young virgin on her way home from visiting sick relatives, severely beaten or threatened before she gives in'. Such a construction of victimhood is unhelpful for several reasons. Among them are that victimhood comes to be constructed in line with a particular form of femininity which can create incorrect and damaging assumptions amongst both women and men about the 'kind of person' who is vulnerable to victimisation, for example, young men mistakenly do not realise their own vulnerability to experiencing violence in public spaces (Roberts, 2019). Another reason is that the 'ideal' victim trope constructs ideas about victim blaming, again, that both women and men can hold about the culpability of those victimised, for example, women can blame other women for their own sexual victimisation because it is thought that their own sexualised behaviour precipitated the sexual violence against them (see Kavanaugh, 2013). The construction of the 'ideal' victim is also unhelpful in constructing young women as a group who are always passive, weak and non-agentic and always at the mercy of predatory men. In this article we take the view that it is important to trouble this assumption and reflect the reality of young

women's experiences in order to recognise their agency and suggest ways that this can be built on to challenge violent masculinities. For example, victims report experiencing a range of emotions, thoughts and behaviours as a result of sexual violence: feeling angry, fearful, vulnerable, unsafe, a change in attitudes towards men, and a desire to avoid certain groups, men and places (Kelly, 1988). NUS (2018), for example, found that women were more likely than men to alter their behaviour, such as avoiding certain places as a result of the sexual violence they had experienced. Other strategies of resisting sexual violence include not walking alone (Kavanaugh, 2013), fighting back verbally and physically (Kelly, 1988; Kavanaugh, 2013; Rintaugu et al., 2014), leaving the situation (Kelly, 1988; Kavanaugh, 2013), avoiding the perpetrator, and speaking to somebody they trust (Rintaugu et al., 2014). Kelly (1988) argues that these strategies of resistance signify active opposition by women to deny men's attempts to control them.

Dunn (2012) and Jagervi (2014) note the role agencies such as the police and Victim Support have in helping victims to exercise such strategies of resistance and to 'fight back'. Jagervi (2014) noted that part of this process involves presenting the offender as deviant or a criminal. In this way 'criminality is framed as something foreign' (ibid:78). Yet much sexual harassment occurs on a habitual basis for perpetrators to be defined as deviant and their behaviours abnormal (Kelly, 1988; NUS, 2011; Phipps and Young, 2015). Although much sexual harassment is not criminal, when it is, the contexts in which women experience it, such as in the night-time economy, often make it culturally acceptable and normal (Kavanaugh, 2013). Fundamentally then, victims largely do not report their experiences to the police or victim services. In Kelly's (1988) research none of the sexual harassment experienced by the women was reported to the police. Five cases (out of 42) of sexual assault were reported to the police. In Stenning et al's. (2013) research, 10% of females reported their experiences of sexual harassment to the police and 13% reported them to the university (see also NUS, 2018). The predominant reasons given by women for not reporting include: blaming themselves for misjudging the situation (Stenning et al., 2013); constructing the incident as not serious (Stenning et al., 2013; NUS, 2018), and not being aware that the behaviours constituted sexual violence. Sexual violence is therefore also 'normalised and accepted within higher education spaces' (NUS, 2018:31). These perceptions of many victims that their experiences are normal or trivial can hinder them from coming forward to tell of their victimisation (see

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also ONS, 2018a). However, just because women who are victimised do not report their victimisation to the police or victim services does not mean they do not do anything, including telling others (Jagervi, 2014). As we read the accounts of sexual violence given by respondents in our research it became clear that many of them present a very agentic account of their experience, where they adopt a range of responses that challenge any perception of them as being a passive victim.

The Survey

The data presented here are from the Emerald Project, an online survey conducted in 2016 at a university in the north of England exploring male and female students' perceptions of safety, experiences of interpersonal violence, and help-seeking practices whilst a student at university.   Given the sensitive nature of the survey, we invited key stakeholders (i.e. Campus Security, Legal Governance and Business Assurance, Student Health and Well-being, Students' Union, and the University Executive) within the University community to be part of a steering group to advise us on how best to undertake the study and manage the findings. We also invited students as 'critical friends' to read through and provide feedback on the survey. The research was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee. Students completing the survey were informed that they could withdraw from the survey at any time and decline to answer any questions they wanted to. They were also directed to a help sheet at the end of the survey that indicated a range of sources of help at the university, locally and nationally.

The survey received 1034 responses (approximately 10% of the student body sent the survey[ii]). Of these respondents, 70% were aged between 17-24 years with a mean age of 25 and a modal age of 21. This is comparable to the wider student body sent the survey: 70% of these students were aged between 18-24 years and they had a mean age of 25 years and a modal age of 21 years. Sixty-seven percent of respondents completing the survey were women and 33% were men. This is somewhat comparable to the wider student body sent the survey: 59% of these students were women and 41% were men. Sixty-four per cent of students completing the survey identified as White British, whereas 75% of the student body sent the survey identified as 'White'. Ninety percent of survey

respondents identified as heterosexual/straight, whereas 96% of the student body sent the survey identified as heterosexual. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents had no known disability whereas 92% of the student body sent the survey had no known disability.

The survey asked students about their experiences of four kinds of violence and abuse: verbal abuse or bullying; physical violence or abuse; sexual violence or abuse; and stalking or online harassment. At the end of each section, they were invited to provide an account of a most serious incident of that type of violence. If they opted to provide such an account, they were then asked a detailed set of questions about the incident (e.g., whether they reported the incident and why, what impact the incident had on them). Seventy-five students from the survey provided qualitative responses about sexual violence as a result of responding to that invitation. Their accounts provide the focus of this paper. These students' ages ranged from 17 to 52, with a mean age of 23 and a modal age of 21. Ninety-five percent of them were female, 87% identified as White British, 73% identified as heterosexual/straight and 58% had no known disability. Students writing about their experiences of sexual violence were therefore more likely to be female, identify as White British, to have a disability and to not identify as heterosexual/straight compared to the survey respondents in general. Table 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability.

'Table 1 here'

The qualitative responses were coded in NVivo for themes pertinent to the research question (Seal, 2016), and which 'represent[ed] some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82). We report on these themes and we focus here on women as they most often reported experiences of sexual violence. Wherever possible, their accounts are presented unedited and unabridged to show how women report their experiences of victimisation. The focus of the findings is on 'everyday' sexual harassment and sexual assault, rather than serious sexual assault, as this was the range of sexual violence most often reported by this sample.

Analysis of the Findings

The Everyday Contexts of Sexual Violence

The survey was divided into sections corresponding to the four different types of interpersonal violence (verbal abuse/bullying, physical violence/abuse, sexual violence/abuse and stalking/online harassment); however, respondents routinely wrote about their experiences of sexual violence within and alongside their experiences of other forms of violence/abuse. For these women, sexual violence permeated all types of abuse, and defied placement into neat pre-constructed categories. A significant minority of students regularly experience sexual harassment on and off campus (see also Phipps and Young, 2015), as the following excerpts illustrate:

> Being approached by another student (male) when in the library, he was trying to "hit on me."

> This happens from cars driving past. Sometimes the cars toot as they go past, and sometimes they roll their windows down, whistle and make rude comments.

Particularly dominant in the accounts of women and akin to previous research (Kavanaugh, 2013), were their experiences of sexual assault in pubs and clubs. As the following student states:

> After a student night out a guy had forced me to kiss him by pulling me by my arm and holding me until he had kissed me. He was very drunk.

It was clear from women's accounts that perpetrators of sexual harassment were persistent and reluctant to take no for an answer. It is also clear from the account below that sexual violence is *not* a problem of unclear messages from women (see Amir, 1968) but a problem of men's predatory behaviour:

> So pretty early in the semester, I was out at a bar dancing with my friends. This guy came up to me and he whispered in my ear asking if I wanted him to take me to bed. I said no, but he kept trying to get me to go home with him. He insisted he was a nice guy, and I said that I didn't care. I don't remember the exact words he used, but he said something about how he would be able to make me feel good and have a good time. At that point, I told him I wasn't going home with him and made my friends leave that bar and go somewhere else.

As Kelly (1988:83) noted: 'the attention or behaviour of the man was experienced as intrusive, involving unwarranted assumptions of intimacy'. The female student resisted such sexual harassment and moved away from the perpetrator: what we term a short-term strategy to deal with sexual violence, which we discuss in the next section. In two ways, the female student might be perceived as a non-'ideal' victim because firstly, of the space she occupies and her behaviour ('out at a bar dancing') and thus, she might be thought of as 'asking for it', and secondly, she illustrates active agency in her resistance to the sexual harassment. But the sexual violence (often) had a significant impact on the female students who experienced it. Many of these impacts are found in the existing research (Kelly, 1988; NUS, 2011, 2018), and for our research, they fall into the following categories: feeling uncomfortable, annoyed, wary/fearful, and impacts on mental health, and academic study. Because of the range of impacts of sexual violence, female students develop a range of strategies of resistance to deal with sexual violence and it is to these that we now turn.

Resisting Sexual Violence: The Agentic Victim/Bystander

Five themes related to resisting sexual violence were found. These were divided into short-term strategies: i) moving away from the perpetrator; ii) confronting the perpetrator; iii) collective resistance; iv) reporting the incident; and v) the long-term strategy of restricting behaviours, which might also include some collective resistance. Similar to the strategies found in the existing literature (Kelly, 1988; Kavanaugh, 2013), short-term strategies were of the moment, as the following excerpt illustrates moving away from the perpetrator:

> I was sitting in the library doing work and a group of 'lads' started making inappropriate comments about the top that I was wearing. The things they were saying made me so uncomfortable that I ended up moving away from them.

The female student in the above account may be perceived as an 'ideal' victim and not culpable because she is doing respectable work; however, her resistance to the sexual violence by leaving the situation, suggests agency, rather than passiveness. Her position as a victim is not binaried, but nuanced: inhabiting contradictory and complex positions of *both* 'ideal' (non-culpable) and non-'ideal' (agentic) victim.

In the following account, the female student reporting her sexually violent experience in a nightclub illustrates confronting the perpetrator by fighting back verbally and physically, similar to the findings of existing research (Kelly, 1988; Kavanaugh, 2013; Rintaugu et al., 2014). She would most likely be perceived as a non-'ideal' victim (culpable because of where she is). Ironically, she may well have been perceived as the perpetrator:

> Male in nightclub tried to put his hand up my skirt resulting in me throwing my drink in his face. Same guy later on then tried to put his hand down my top resulting in me punching him in the face. He then tried to ask for my phone number and enquired if I was a lesbian when he wouldn't take my no (and then telling him I have a boyfriend) when I didn't want to give it to him.

Embedded in some of the women's accounts is the dating model Fenton and Jones (2017) outline: the dominant male who initiates requests (persistently) for sex and courtship from an ordinarily submissive female. The existence of this heterosexual model of dating can help to explain how (perceptions of) men's sexually violent behaviours are reconstructed as not harmful but 'normal' even when women are expected to 'manage' and resist at best intrusive and at worst, as the above account illustrates, violent, initiating behaviours as well as absorb men's punitive intended to be degrading (homophobic) insults (questioning whether she must be a lesbian) when she refuses. Yet, women's responses in our research show them persistently resisting this model of dating and, as in this account, fighting back against being violated. In doing so, they can be seen to challenge the normality of the 'dominant' heterosexual dating model of courtship and reconstruct it as harmful.

In resisting sexual violence, respondents also enlisted the help of others, what we call collective resistance, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> […] There are always middle aged single men who pry on all the girls. Especially the very drunk and alone ones. I have saved a drunk girl who I didn't know on a night out once. She ended up alone and two guys where pestering her and trying to get her in a car. I pretended I knew her and pit her in a taxi home so she was safe. [sic]

Contemporary police campaigns often promote collective responsibility to ensure individuals' safety: exhorting, especially women, to 'stay together' when out at night and

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avoid being alone (see for example Kent Police, 2018). Growing-up, young girls are told to avoid strangers (see Stanko, 1990), and they are often chaperoned (Valentine, 1992). These messages add to the perceived sexual vulnerability of lone women by both men *and* women. Both the men (described in the account above) and the woman giving the account also see the drunk 'girl' on her own as passive and weak because she is unchaperoned and drunk. Yet whilst the men are perceived by the woman giving the account as about to take advantage of the 'girl's' situational vulnerability, she herself does not leave her to her fate because she has 'asked for it'. Instead, she perceives the whole situation as harmful and becomes an active bystander. In doing so, she 'simultaneously sends a powerful message to the wrongdoer and to other bystanders about the social unacceptability of the [men's] behavior and the social acceptability of challenging it' (Fenton and Mott, 2017:451). Research, albeit outwith the UK has shown the positive aspects of bystander interventions for sexual violence on college campuses (Banyard et al., 2004; Coker et al., 2016). Bystander interventions are important because 'over time, the more interventions are made, the more the social norms that condition behavior will shift' (Fenton and Mott, 2017:451). In collectively resisting sexual victimisation, the female respondent telling the account above, has, perhaps inadvertently begun to challenge the perceived patriarchal power and entitlement of (heterosexual) men and the perceived vulnerability and culpability of (assumed to be heterosexual) women.

Another way women in our research resist the sexual violence against them is by reporting the incident. As in other research (Kelly, 1988; Stenning et al., 2013; NUS, 2018), the proportion of women reporting formally is low and most reporting is informal as the following except shows:

> When I'd first started my course in my first year I was walking on [name of campus] campus to a lecture a man approached me randomly to ask me if I was taken. I was alone and it was quite nerve racking as this man was a complete stranger. I reported it to my lecturer at the time. […].

Here the lone woman perceives herself as sexually vulnerable, and the stranger as predatory and harmful. In reporting the incident, she too is challenging and reconstructing the 'dominant' dating model of courtship, which in this excerpt illustrates the way in which dating language communicates tropes such as male possession: the question of whether she is 'taken'. It also illustrates the way in which any woman can be approached

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because they are assumed to be heterosexual and potentially available and responsive to the men. Such resistance to this heterosexual dating model is further evidenced in the range of reasons students gave for reporting the sexual violence: to get help, to stop it, to warn others, and because of the emotional impact. Female victims in our research are often not passive but agentic.

Resisting Sexual Violence: Agency within Limits

The long-term strategy of resisting sexual violence through restricting their behaviours was the most littered throughout women's accounts. This can be explained, as Walby (1989:224) argues, because male violence against women 'has a regular social form and, as a result of women's well-founded expectations of its routine nature, has consequences for women's actions'. Thus, avoidance behaviours where women change their routines to avoid particular places, groups or men are very common and our findings add to the existing literature (Kelly, 1988; Roberts, 2019). As this female student illustrates:

> I used to not care about studying late in the library or being around uni late but now I always make sure I drive in to uni so I'm not followed even though I don't live far from the uni. I always leave when my friends leave and have them walk me to my car if it's parked in the car park and the houses behind [name of building].

As well as individual avoidance strategies, this student refers to collective resistance, which we have discussed above, as part of a long-term strategy to resist sexual violence. As a result of a previous experience this student is now exerting effort to ensure that, were she to be victimised, she would be perceived as an 'ideal' victim: her precautions evidence her lack of culpability. Simultaneously, however, her behaviours also give her a sense of safety and entitlement to inhabit the night time. Such avoidance behaviours are thought to account for women's relatively low victimisation rates of serious violence in public spaces (see Roberts, 2019). Yet her positioning as a (potential) victim is nuanced: whilst she is active and agentic in order to resist further victimisation, this is a constrained limited 'freedom' which to some extent concedes to the patriarchal social order.

Conclusion

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A significant minority of women regularly experience sexual violence particularly sexual harassment. A limitation of our research is that the sample only includes those respondents willing to accept the invitation to outline a most serious incident of the violence they had experienced. An interesting aspect of the sample who did take up the invitation is that they were slightly less likely to identify as heterosexual/straight, and they were more likely to have a disability than the survey sample. We consider this a useful finding that adds to emerging research illustrating whilst gender is a crucial factor that predicts victimisation, it is intersecting identities that provide the more nuanced details about, for example, which groups of women are most likely to be victimised. Research indicates that bisexual women are more likely to report sexual violence than heterosexual women (NUS, 2018; ONS, 2018b). Results such as this require us to urgently problematise the ways in which heterosexuality – of perpetrators and those victimised - is assumed in most studies about sexual violence against women.

The other finding that emerged from the qualitative accounts is that female students document a range of strategies to resist sexual violence. In doing so, women's positioning as victims is nuanced, challenging the 'ideal' construction of the victim who is passive and not culpable. When they endeavour to conform to that aspect of the 'ideal' victim, that expects non-culpability their choices are constrained as they concede to that heterosexual model of dating that perceives men as entitled to approach them. On the other hand, by acting agentically women challenge patriarchal ideals because they are both problematising the perpetrator's behaviour and their strategies of resistance can be seen as examples of social change. These strategies of resistance have implications for four interconnected ways forward: bystander interventions; education about healthy relationships; promoting acceptable behaviours; and reporting unacceptable behaviours.

Universities UK (2016) recommended that bystander intervention programmes be implemented in universities to challenge the social norms and cultural contexts upholding sexual violence (Fenton and Mott, 2017). This paper argues that (ostensibly heterosexual) men sexually harass women because of at least two reasons. First, dominant discourses about heteronormative hegemonic masculinity result in 'lads' act together to sexually evaluate women. Such practices serve to secure the dominance of males amongst other

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men (Quinn, 2002). When men in Quinn's (2002:397) research were asked to consider the 'game of girl watching from the perspective of a woman', they understood the harmful nature of the sexual violence. This raises implications for educating men about sexual harassment. However, Fenton and Mott (2017) note the challenges of engaging men in interventions. They argue that introducing 'bystander theory in a neutral context, avoid[ing] words associated with feminism, give men space to process emotions about the gendered aspect of violence, and reiterate that male participants are not being blamed' (ibid:452). Placing the prevention of sexual violence with the community, as in bystander interventions, also avoids an individual blame culture (ibid). The second reason we have explored is the existence of the dominant heterosexual model of dating that constructs a heteronormative binaried model for dating that relies on a persistent heterosexual male initiator and a submissive heterosexual female responder (see Fenton and Jones, 2017). Whilst sexual consent workshops at universities are becoming more commonplace for new students (see for example University of Bristol, 2015), more education about intimacy and dating needs to be implemented in the higher education context. Little of this is done in compulsory education although this is set to change (Children and Social Work Act, 2017). To avoid men becoming resistant to such interventions (Fenton and Mott, 2017), it is important to recruit positive male champions and allies to provide alternative constructions of masculinity to challenge group behaviour and a 'pack mentality' (Phipps and Young, 2015:13) that constructs other men as interested and impressed by male sexual 'conquests' (see Quinn, 2002).

Universities need to reinforce this education with a zero-tolerance approach to addressing sexual violence (NUS, 2011; Universities UK, 2016) by visibly presenting bold messages about appropriate behaviours: both on and off campus. This, coupled with practical and visible support within Universities for women and men to report their experiences of sexual violence (Phipps and Smith, 2012; Stenning et al., 2013) and visible systems of accountability will help promote the necessary culture shift. Finally, challenging dominant social ideas about the passivity and non-culpability of the 'ideal' victim by challenging victim blaming, promoting perpetrator blaming and reconstructing femininity/victims as agentic, could lead to contexts in which those who speak out about their experiences of sexual violence are listened to, and the onus for explaining their behaviour falls to those who perpetrate sexual violence.

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[i] Sexual harassment could also involve physical contact because women experience sexual violence along a continuum where 'sexual assault shades into sexual harassment' and thus there was some overlap in how women defined sexual harassment and sexual assault (Kelly, 1988:107).
[ii] Excluding distance campuses.

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Table for Article

Table 1: Socio-demographics of Respondents

		<u>Survey Respondents</u>		<u>Respondents Writing about</u> <u>Sexual Violence</u>	
		%	n	%	n
Age	Mean	n/a	25	n/a	23
	Mode	n/a	21	n/a	21
Gender	Male	33	337	5	4
	Female	67	691	95	70
Number of Students			1028*		74*
Ethnicity	White British	64	657	87	65
	Other	36	363	13	10
Numbers of Students			1020*		75
Sexuality	Heterosexual/ Straight	90	910	73	55
	Other	10	102	27	20
Numbers of Students			1012*		75
Disability	None known	79	817	58	43
	Yes	21	217**	42	31
Number of Students			1034		74*
Total Students (n)			1,034		75

*difference in figures is missing cases

**figure may also include missing cases[i]

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[i] Due to the way the questions were asked about disability, we are unable to decipher missing cases.